

# Working with Aboriginal community members experiencing family violence

## Tip Sheet for Practitioners

### Culturally Safe Practitioners are:

#### OPEN AND TRANSPARENT

- Aboriginal people need to feel like you are on their team, so you need to be open, transparent and, if safe to do so, keep the community member/family informed about what you are doing throughout your provision of service.
- Be open and transparent about your role; what you intend to do with the information you collect; and explain who will have access to that information and the limitations of confidentiality.
- Be transparent about your agency's connection to Child Protection and what and when you may have to report to Child Protection.
- Inform community members if/when you need to share information with any other service.
- Tell Aboriginal community members that if you ever need to break confidentiality, you will let them know – then follow through with this if you do need to break confidentiality.

#### WILLING TO CREATE A CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Acknowledge Country at the beginning of all agency meetings and at sessions with Aboriginal community members.
- Create culturally safe spaces to meet with Aboriginal community members in the organisation's offices/spaces (e.g. display plaques and signs to Acknowledge Country and Traditional Owners).
- Do not use clip boards or write notes when you are trying to engage community members (Child Protection has historically written notes and checked assessment boxes whilst assessing Aboriginal family's homes. Therefore, writing notes whilst meeting with Aboriginal community members can trigger a fear of child removal).

#### TRAUMA INFORMED

- Be respectful of culture, what people are going through and what the community have experienced due to colonisation, and keep trauma-informed practice front of mind.



## GENUINE

- Engaging with Aboriginal community members requires a genuine approach – you may need to share some things about yourself to be able to support effective engagement. For example, you may need to be real and vulnerable with a community member to be able to authentically connect.

## RESPECTFUL

- Respect that cultural connection can benefit Aboriginal people, but this is a choice.
- Be respectful of the load that Aboriginal people carry.

## FLEXIBLE

- Deliver services with a flexible approach:
  - Offer flexibility with appointments and make sure that appointments work for a community member.
  - Be adaptable if community members need to reschedule or cancel (a community member may need to cancel more than once. Services need to be respectful of the load that Aboriginal people carry and offer multiple appointment opportunities if they miss them).
- Provide outreach to a community member's home or location or pick them up from their homes and take them to the service location and drop them home. (Transport is a huge barrier to engagement).


## ABLE TO SIMPLIFY SERVICES

- Use clear English and avoid jargon.
- Check with a community member more than once that they understand what you are saying.
  - A community member may need a support person present for initial engagement to help support this. (Some community members may say they understand when they don't because they're too embarrassed or fearful about the repercussions of them saying they don't understand.)
- Simplify forms and systems as much as possible to make them clear for community members to understand.

## COMMITTED TO REGULAR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Participate in trauma-informed training, particularly in relation to colonial violence and intergenerational trauma experiences for Aboriginal people.
- Prioritise your ongoing professional learning and development around cultural awareness, safety and humility. This is ongoing work.





Remember that the Aboriginal definition of family violence is broader than what is used in the mainstream services

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force defined family violence in the context of Aboriginal communities as

**'an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.'**

The definition also acknowledges the spiritual and cultural perpetration of violence by non-Aboriginal people against Aboriginal partners which manifests as exclusion or isolation from Aboriginal culture and/or community.